

Summary – Harpswell’s Proposal to Withdraw from SAD75

Important facts

- The District is well managed and provides a sound education.
- Harpswell students benefit from the availability of programs and resources and the diversity of students and educational experiences in a multi-town District.

The problem: the State’s EPS cost-sharing formulas on top of the local cost-sharing formula impose an unfair and unsustainable burden on Harpswell taxpayers.

- EPS cost-sharing is driven by property values and ignores ability to pay. Harpswell’s burden will continue to rise much faster than for the other towns.
- Taking into account the State contribution for the other 3 towns, Harpswell’s cost per student is 18% higher than the average for the other towns.
- Looking only at local payments, Harpswell pays 3-4 times as much per student as the other 3 towns.
- The result is that payments by some towns actually decline while Harpswell’s costs grow much faster than District-wide spending and are the highest in the District.

What makes this unsustainable

- For Harpswell: our year-round family median income is the lowest of the 4 towns.
- Today the District caps its spending to spare Harpswell from double-digit cost increases. This strangles District funds for important local-option programs such as AP classes, languages, music and athletics.

Harpswell’s proposed solution

- Under the proposed withdrawal agreement, Harpswell will withdraw on June 30, 2007 and tuition in at least 90% of K-12 students for at least 4 years at State-computed tuition rates. Harpswell tuition money will be available for use in qualifying schools outside the District for up to 10% of K-12 students.
- The District will continue to operate all schools including those in Harpswell and to provide all related services including transportation and special education. All staff, employees and assets will remain with the District and Harpswell will continue to service its portion of current District debt under the withdrawal agreement. Harpswell reserves the right to recover its elementary schools and other assets in the future if and when the tuition arrangement with the District ends.
- Harpswell students will continue to attend their usual schools. The District will guarantee that Harpswell students continue to have the same access to programs, services and co-curricular activities and to be treated the same as other students.
- Harpswell will elect a 5-person School Committee to oversee our relationship with the District. The School Committee will be directly responsible to voters under a new Town ordinance. Two of its members will sit on the District Board with voting rights on the Finance Committee.
- Harpswell will pay tuition and its share of other District costs. In addition we will make a voluntary supplementary annual contribution to support the District’s local-option programs.
- This agreement will protect Harpswell from an already excessive and rapidly growing cost burden caused by the State’s EPS formula.
- This agreement will put Harpswell on the same footing as the other 3 towns for future capital spending on Mt. Ararat High School.
- The proposed agreement will result in a 16% reduction of Harpswell property taxes.